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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the relationship between pidgins and creoles and indigenous language maintenance, explaining that the development of pidgin and creole languages always occurs in the context of language contact, often between a European colonial language and one or more indigenous languages. Pidgins are languages that are primarily used as a means of communication among people who do not share a common language. They develop in the attempts of people speaking two languages to communicate and involve processes of simplification in phonology and grammar. Pidgins develop in different contexts. Creoles are languages that develop from pidgins that become more widespread and stabilized. Creoles become mother tongues or first languages, with an expanded vocabulary and elaborated syntax. Mixed languages fuse the vocabulary of one language with the grammar of another. Most North American indigenous languages are shifting, generally involving a gradual loss of the indigenous language in favor of English. Language education is being used to intervene and change the natural direction of the language shift. An example of this language education among speakers of Kwak'wala in the northern Vancouver Island area is presented. (Contains 11 references.) (SM)

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Maintaining Indigenous Languages in North America: What Can We Learn from Studies of Pidgins and Creoles?

Anne Goodfellow, Pauline Alfred

What do studies of pidgins and creoles have to do with indigenous language maintenance? The development of pidgin and creole languages always occurs in the context of *language contact*, often between a European colonial language and one or more indigenous languages. All Native languages in North America have been in contact with a European language (usually English) for at least the last two hundred years. Educators and researchers in the area of Native language maintenance often comment that students are not learning the "proper" language. In many cases, young children come to school with a knowledge of only English, so they are learning the Native language as a second language. What often happens is that they learn Native vocabulary but maintain English grammatical structures and phonological distinctions. Are they speaking the Native language? Are they speaking English? Or are they speaking a "mixed" language? Pidgins, creoles, and mixed languages are examples of how new languages develop over time through language contact. Perhaps the Native languages as spoken by young people can be regarded as types of pidgin languages. If we look at language learning in this way and realize that all languages change over time due to various influences, perhaps we can be more accepting of the way that Native languages are spoken today and encourage young people to continue speaking the language, in whatever form.

What are Pidgins, Creoles, and Mixed Languages?

Pidgins are languages that are "primarily used as a means of communication among people who do not share a common language" (Muysken & Smith, 1995, p. 3). Pidgin languages are usually not anyone's mother tongue; that is, they are not the first language learned by a child. They develop in the attempts of people speaking two languages to communicate and involve processes of simplification in phonology and grammar.

Pidgins develop in different contexts. Some of these are trade; interethnic contact of a religious, political, or ceremonial nature; or when people speaking different languages live and work together over an extended period of time (Bakker, 1995, pp. 27-28). For example, Chinook Jargon, or Wawa, spoken along the Northwest coast of North America, is a pidgin that was used primarily for trade but also for ceremonial and religious purposes. The word "potlatch" comes from Chinook Jargon *pálač* (Thompson & Kinkade, 1990, p. 50) meaning "give-away." This pidgin is still spoken by a few people in British Columbia and Oregon (Johnson & Zenk, 2000).

Creoles are languages that develop from pidgins that become more widespread and stabilized. Creoles become mother tongues or first languages. In comparison to a pidgin, a creole's vocabulary is expanded and its syntax is elaborated (Salzmann, 1998, pp. 174-175). For example, Hawaiian Creole English is spoken by about half a million people in the Hawaiian Islands. It developed

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from a pidgin language used in the nineteenth-century sugar plantations there (Watson-Gegeo, 1994, p. 102).

Mixed languages are somewhat different from pidgins and creoles. Essentially, a mixed language fuses the vocabulary of one language with the grammar of another (Bakker & Muysken, 1995, p. 41). For example, Michif, the language of Métis people, combines Cree grammar with mostly French vocabulary, although some of the vocabulary is Cree as well (Bakker & Muysken, 1995, pp. 45-46). This language developed out of the interaction between French fur traders and Cree people (primarily Cree women) prior to the 1800s. It is currently spoken by about 1,000 people in the Plains area of Canada and the United States, most speakers being over 60 years of age (Smith, 1995, p. 370). And its future, like many indigenous languages in Canada, is threatened (Fleury, 2000).

Indigenous Language Shift

Now that we know what pidgins, creoles, and mixed languages are, let us turn to the following question: What is happening to most North American indigenous languages now?

As we are all well aware, most North American Native societies have been involved in a process known as "language shift." In language shift, in a matter of a few generations, people shift their mother tongue from one language to another. In the case of Kwak'wala, spoken in the northern Vancouver Island area, this shift has involved a gradual loss of Kwak'wala in favour of English. This case is certainly not unique, and it is not news to you—as you are all well aware, this has happened to most other indigenous languages of North America. This is the reason we hold these conferences—to see if we can somehow avoid this shift.

The interesting thing to note is that the processes involved in pidginization are remarkably similar to those of languages undergoing shift to another language. In discussing how indigenous languages change in similar culture contact situations, researchers have noticed processes of simplification evident in bilinguals and semi-speakers of the indigenous language. The main process appears to be one of analogy that reflects structures in the other language.

This is sometimes referred to as interference, which is "the tendency of second language learners to transfer patterns from their first language to the second language" (Gumperz & Gumperz, 1982, p. 16). In the case of Kwak'wala, we would attribute this interference to a prolonged period of exposure to the English language and Eurocanadian culture because English has become the mother tongue of Kwakwaka̲'wakw children; thus, most people today of Kwakwaka̲'wakw ancestry are anglophone. Therefore, when Kwak'wala is learned as a second language (usually in the context of elementary school), it is influenced by the English grammar and vocabulary that have already been established in the cognitive schemata of the child's linguistic structure.

The following examples from fieldwork done in the Kwakwaka̲'wakw area illustrate how, in our opinion, some young Kwak'wala-speakers are speaking a

type of mixed Kwak'wala-English, or a "Pidgin Kwak'wala." These examples are from an older speaker who is over 50 years old and a younger speaker in her early twenties. Also note that the younger speaker is considered to be a very good speaker for her age—she is *not* typical. Most Kwakwaka'wakw in their twenties do not have this command of the language.

In the tables below, we have examples of grammatical and phonological differences between the two generations of speakers. In the grammatical examples, we see how the older speaker uses suffixes rather than individual words to mark grammatical differences. Kwak'wala is a polysynthetic language, unlike English, which is more analytical. In these examples, the younger speaker uses an analogy with English when speaking Kwak'wala.

In the phonological examples, we see a loss of some of the distinctive features of Kwak'wala, probably because they do not exist in English. So, in essence, the younger speaker is speaking Kwak'wala with an "English accent."

Table 1. Examples of Grammatical Differences:

suffix=ʔstu (eye, door, round opening)
"to wipe your eyes"

Older generation	***Younger generation***
didʔstó	díxidus gégasus
wipe'eye	you wipe-your eyes

suffix=əxst(a) (opening; mouth of animal; to eat, meal; to talk about)
"small mouth"

Older generation	***Younger generation***
t'óg^{w}əxsta	amáʔi səms
mouth'small	small mouth

Table 2. Examples of Phonological Differences:

Loss of Glottalization (glottalized "p")

Older generation	***Younger generation***
ṗəsṗaẏú (ears)	pəspəyú

Loss of Uvular (back "g")

Older generation	***Younger generation***
gayágas (eyes)	gégasus

Loss of Velar Fricative (loss of "x")[1]

Older generation	***Younger generation***
həbəxstéʔ (beard)	həbəstá

So how can we apply this knowledge to the stabilization of indigenous languages? Because we know that all languages change in contact situations, perhaps we can use this to our advantage. If we, as researchers and educators, can somehow "arrest" the process of language change so that it does not lead to a

complete shift to English, there is a better chance for the indigenous language to continue, albeit in a different form, similar to a pidgin or mixed language.

In order to do this, one thing that must change is attitude. Pidgin languages all over the world suffer from a lack of prestige. In our own efforts to maintain indigenous languages, we would like the children to speak the same way that their grandparents do or even the way their great grandparents did. Is this a realistic goal? Are we setting ourselves up for failure? Of course these are all well-intentioned efforts, but rather than saying such things as, "Our children are not speaking the language properly" because they may use some English vocabulary or grammar, perhaps we should encourage this language use and accept this "different" language. Is it taking it too far to suggest the development of language programs based on the new language? "Pidgin Kwak'wala," for example? This may be the way we must go in the future anyway once the responsibility for maintaining the indigenous languages falls to the generations who speak the language imperfectly, usually those who learn it as a second language (see Montler, 1999, p. 489).

The difference between the development of pidgins, creoles, and mixed languages and language education is that the first three occur naturally. These types of languages also may die out by shifting to English. In language education, we are attempting to change the natural direction of language shift. Language planning by its very nature is interventionist.

Kwak'wala Learning in Alert Bay, BC

Pauline Alfred started teaching Kwak'wala in 1976, and she continues in the Kwak'wala as a second language program at Tl'isalagi'lakw school in Alert Bay, British Columbia. The school currently has Kwak'wala immersion in the nursery class taught by Marion Warner and in the Kindergarten class taught by Lorraine Hunt, and work is being done on having immersion for grade one in the near future.

Grades 1 through 10 (the highest grade at the school) receive instruction in Kwak'wala every day for half an hour. They also have a cultural program for learning songs and dances taught by Sandi Willie every day.

According to Pauline, the students coming out of the Kwak'wala language program are not fluent, but they can understand Kwak'wala. They can sing hymns and everyday songs, and they have good pronunciation. The areas of greatest difficulty are in the following: plurals, distinguishing between talking about objects that are "here" and "there" and "visible" and "invisible" because they are different grammatical categories, and past and present tenses.

During June sports, which is a big event in the community, students do presentations in Kwak'wala, and one boy and one girl are chosen as the prince and princess for that year. The students are capable of saying what their names are and where they are from. The speech is usually written in Kwak'wala and read out loud.

Students are very knowledgeable about their culture and use some Kwak'wala words in their everyday speech. Some people come out of the school program capable of carrying on simple conversations.

We have seen a big difference over the past few years in the youth participating in cultural activities in the bighouse (the centre of the potlatch) owing to the language and culture programs in the school. Young people are very knowledgeable about their culture and accept their responsibility for passing this on to future generations, whether in Kwak'wala or English.

Conclusion

If we want to maintain indigenous languages, not only in North America but also throughout the world, perhaps we, as educators and researchers, should re-examine the goals that have been set for language maintenance programs. If we can accept that all languages change over time, we might be more accepting of new forms of language that emerge out of contact situations. These should be promoted in the hopes that a language will not die out altogether, as has been the case with many indigenous languages.

Note

[1] Arabic \r 11. It is interesting that this seems to occur only when the velar fricative is followed by another fricative, here "s". We see the use of "x" above in the example "dixidus gégasus" where it is preceded and followed by a vowel.

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